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The Board of Works for the Westminster District.

STATEMENT with reference to the increased Expenditure of the School Board for London.—Approved at a Special Meeting of the Board held on the 24th March, 1875, the HON^{BLE} ASHLEY PONSONBY in the Chair.

THIS Board, in requesting the co-operation of District Boards and Vestries in regard to the alarming increase in the expenses of the School Board for London—an increase not contemplated even by that Board a little over a year since—desire to intimate that they concur in the principle of “The Elementary Education Act of 1870,” in so far as the same enacts that there should be provided for every School District a sufficient amount of accommodation in public elementary schools available for all the children resident in such district for whose elementary education efficient and suitable provision was not otherwise made. Although it may be admitted that the case of the Metropolis was exceptional, and the school accommodation insufficient, and that the School Board were put in possession of immediate powers to supply the Metropolis with sufficient public school accommodation; yet it should be borne in mind that it was never the intention that all children in the Metropolis requiring education should be sent to Board schools; but, on the contrary, that due regard should be paid to existing schools, so that the same should not be capriciously sacrificed. There are, and will be, as stated by the Rev. Prebendary Irons, D.D., one of the active members of the

School Board for Marylebone, at least 500,000 children in London always needing education : that is to say, 100,000 of the upper classes educated more or less privately, 300,000 already being educated in existing national and other voluntary schools, and 100,000 to be provided for in public elementary schools. There does not appear to be any reason to doubt the correctness of this information, for the first School Board determined that the number of school places which would ultimately be required for all the children of London for whom they had to provide would be about 112,000.

If this policy were carried out, hard as the burden might be, the ratepayers would probably acquiesce therein without serious complaint, notwithstanding that the expenditure has already been increased from the rate of two pence in the pound, held out by the first Board as a maximum, to a rate of something over three pence in the pound. The first Board very properly, having due regard to economy as well as efficiency, stated that a little over a half-penny in the pound would be sufficient to cover the cost of sites and buildings, and that in addition to this, the rate for the maintenance of schools ; for the enforcement of the bye-laws ; for industrial schools ; and for current expenditure would not, it was hoped, when all the schools were at work be increased to more than three half-pence in the pound ; making a total rate (only however to be gradually reached) of about two pence in the pound as the cost of a complete system of efficient education for those classes of the Metropolis hitherto unprovided with schools, and of insuring more regular attendance at school of all classes.

This policy appeared on the whole to be acceptable to the ratepayers, for no great outcry was raised in the matter, but this was probably and to a great extent because the promises of the first School Board were looked upon as binding, and it was supposed the line they had so carefully and considerately laid down would be followed by their successors.

The alarming increase in the expenditure of the School Board leading to a rate, already exceeding by more than one-half the maximum given out by the first School Board, has drawn the most serious attention of the public to the proceedings of the second School Board, a body consisting, no doubt, of many excellent and learned men—but, unfortunately also, of many whose position in life makes it difficult for them to understand the evil effect of adding to the burdens of the already heavily taxed ratepayers of the Metropolis.

Dr. Irons very lucidly shews that, if the National and other Voluntary Schools be broken up, the 300,000 children now educated in them must be provided for in Board Schools, and that if the cost of the present 100,000 children be three pence in the pound, it may, approximately, be taken that, to provide for the education of 300,000 more children, the rate would reach one shilling in the pound.

Dr. Irons says that the education of the 100,000 children of the poorer classes is well worth the present rate of three pence in the pound, and this may be so and necessary, but it appears unnecessary to enter into competition with existing schools, especially as the 100,000 children of the upper classes appear to escape the watchful eye of the School Board, and will probably be allowed the privilege of private education, but this may be matter for future consideration.

Possibly if the National Schools and other Voluntary Schools had been extended, the cost of elementary education might have been considerably lessened, but it is probably too late for the adoption of any such views, and it can only now be urged that the School Board have provided ample accommodation according to their original intentions, and will do well to stay their hands for the present, in order that the effect of what has been done may be seen and understood by all parties interested in the question of elementary education before any further expenditure is incurred.

In the parishes of St. Margaret and St. John, Westminster, alone, Schools for about 1,000 children will shortly be erected under the provisions of the "Emanuel Hospital Scheme," and it is more than probable that the various Denominational Schools, as well as Endowed Schools, will be enlarged or increased in number.

It may reasonably be argued that there should be a limit to the taxing powers of the School Board. Probably the ratepayers would not be greatly dissatisfied with a threepenny rate *as a maximum*; but if, as now appears, it be intended to advance beyond this, treating it in fact *as a minimum* rather than *as a maximum*, then the ratepayers must look to the matter boldly and earnestly, and, if necessary, Parliament must be appealed to to limit the rating powers of the School Board.

Mr. Freeman, the able Chairman of the Finance Committee of the School Board, is reported to have said (*vide Times* of 11th March),—"The ideas of the first Board were as poverty itself, in comparison to the action of the present Board; for what with costly open playgrounds, and proposals for covered playgrounds, and the adoption of means for keeping the wind and sun from the children, the rates were running up very high indeed;" and (*vide Metropolitan* of 13th March),—"He deprecated the constantly-increasing cost of the Board schools, and confessed he should not be surprised to see the education rate get as high as sixpence in the pound, if they did not commence to expend less money in school buildings."

The cost of providing the present Board schools has far exceeded the confident estimate of the first School Board, viz., about £11 per head, and it is therefore necessary that extreme caution be exercised to keep all expenditure within the proper limits of economy.

Hardly any explanation was afforded to the ratepayers by the Finance Committee of the School Board, on recently bringing up the enormously increased estimate of threepence in the pound;

but it is at the least due to the ratepayers that their representatives should explain why the original policy of the School Board has been departed from to so serious an extent, and what are their intentions with regard to the future.

The following table, published by Dr. Irons, shows that, although the School Board are still erecting new schools, there are 27,507 places which, on the average, are never used in "London School Board" schools.

Why then, it may fairly be asked, does the School Board ignore this fact, and continue the erection of additional schools?

Division of the Metropolis.		School accommodation in School Board Schools under 869 Teachers.			Average attendances.
1	City of London	...	430	...	224
2	Chelsea	...	4,495	...	3,182
3	Finsbury	...	13,119	...	9,280
4	Greenwich	...	9,581	...	7,239
5	Hackney	...	12,810	...	9,960
6	Lambeth	...	15,358	...	12,641
7	Marylebone	...	9,827	...	6,440
8	Southwark	...	11,470	...	7,467
9	Tower Hamlets	...	21,782	...	14,932
10	Westminster	(has no Board School yet).			
			98,872		71,365
			71,365		

That is *27,507 places which on the average are never used in "London School Board" schools.

It is hoped that this expression, of what it is believed may be

* This includes such formerly voluntary schools as have now been transferred to the rates. Nearly 90 schools are new, 100 transferred; total 190.

truthfully stated to be the general opinion in the Metropolis, may lead the School Board to stay its hand for the present at all events, in order that the real requirements of elementary education may be better ascertained, and that it may be seen whether what has already been done will not have so large and beneficial an effect upon voluntary education as to render further action by the School Board wholly unnecessary.

(Ordered to be signed),

ASHLEY PONSONBY,

Chairman.

JOHN HARRIS,

Clerk to the Board.





